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**Celedonio Galaviz**

**“Traducción”**

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**Pearl Cheser and Cestelia Steludio**

PC: It's April sixth, two thousand eight. We are interviewing Celedonio Galaviz from Camarillo California and the interviewer is Pearl Cheser and

CS: Cestala Steludio

CG: It wants to stay... ha ha ha.

PC: Mr. Gomez... I wanted to ask you... In what year did you come here form Mexico?

CG: 1956.

PC: What area are you from?

CG: Jalisco.

PC: Oh Jalisco. What is the town called?

CG: Guacopia el Alto, Jalisco.

PC: When you came here, how did you know about the *Braceros* program?

CG: How did I know?

PG: Yes.. through the radio?

CG: During the first revolution... two men came to my town. This was big. We wanted to go work in the United States.

Since they [*Braceros*] came up here, they have been earning money, being fed, and getting motivated to succeed. Twelve [men] came from that area. It was 1940... I was not married and I had no plans. Being from there, one got excited to learn about the *Bracero* program. In that time we used *morrales*, the ones that were made of leather, like bags right? En that time, there was a lot of money, his bag was full of money. And he walked from here to the garage and had to change arms, because that bag was so full of money.

People started to notice that everyone from young to old started to immigrate. Some wanted to join the war. I wasn't ignorant. How could one go to war without knowing English? They needed immigrants because the workers from here were off to war. In fifty six there was a list that came to us from Guadalajara. They needed two hundred men to go work in the United States. They had tickets for us. From then, I was put in charge until we arrived here. I came to be in charge of these groups of one hundred men... four groups. That's when we got the name, "*Braceros*".

PC: Where did they end up?

CG: From here to San Diego. I was contracted in Spring Valley for three years.

PC: I know Spring Valley. I was there a year ago.

CG: Yeah?

CS: What type of work were you doing?

CG: All field work. I have been a farmer my whole life. I worked in the field in my country. I planted corn and beans, using oxen or mules or whatever. It was truly hard. In that time there were not tools like there are today. Today there are tractors and all that. But, people like this manner of harvesting.

I was contracted for three years in Spring Valley. I got so accustomed to being there that I forgot all about the water problem.

PC: What happened after those three years?

CG: I liked my boss. He helped me with my financial statements. In that time you needed a statement of earnings for the bank. The boss was responsible for the worker. I officially immigrated in seventy one.

And... this is nothing more than bad luck. I have been in this country for more than fifty years and I never learned English. My story is difficult. There were two revolutions in Mexico and my father was in both. There were the cristeros.

In that time there were no schools.

The president of Mexico was Porfirio Díaz. He did not want the people went to school. The people wanted to read.

They did not know how to read or how to teach themselves so the only goal they had was to find work.

I did not go to school. There were many things that made it hard for me to learn English.

When I got my green card, then they would give us our Mexican passport. Before that... in the 50's... I was in Texas.

My wife taught me to read. I didn't know how.

Before that I would write... I knew some letters... but I didn't understand all of them, but we communicated.

When I tried to immigrate, I started to learn all the letters. I bought a newspaper every day in Tijuana to get practice.

Thank God that at the consulate, they only made me read half a page. The consulate said to me "ok, you passed". Because when I was 35 years old I already lived here.

I am ashamed I could never learn English.

CS: My mom is the same. She came here about 30 years ago and she barely speaks English. She speaks enough to understand but she cannot converse well. You have to talk to her slowly for her to understand. She doesn't care. The funny part is that when they give someone a citizenship test, it is asked that they read and write in English. She was like a student. For a few weeks she wrote and spoke because she knew they were going to give her an English test. When the test passed, she stopped studying.

CG: When one studies to gain citizenship, they only study for that purpose. I studied for five years, but not anymore.

PG: Did you meet your wife in the United States?

CG: No, she is from Mexico. She is from a ranch. In 91' I became a citizen too. And I have been a citizen for more than 20 years.

PG: How old are you?

CG: What?

PG: How old are you? When were you born?

CG: 1921.

PG: Born in 1921.

CG: I am 87.

PG: How many children do you have?

CG: Seven. Look, some of them are in that portrait. Three daughters and four sons.

PG: All good-looking.

CG: One is 60 years old.

PG: Congratulations.

CG: Thanks.

PG: How was your boss during the *Braceros* program. How did he treat you?

CG: Very good, because my bosses were Japanese. I will tell you when you want me to. I love them, even though they are of another race.

It is because of them that me and my sons, and many others are here. Because of their abilities, they helped me, perhaps they helped me too much.

PG: Did they provide you with they place you were living?

CG: No, they just had a house there. We had a stove, a refrigerator, we all had beds, but we only had one room. In the end, we had everything we needed.

PG: Was the house for their family, or many people?

CG: When I was a Bracero, after I came to San Diego, a friend recommended a job here in Somis. I worked here 27 years and had great bosses. My wife and I thank God for these great bosses.

My wife had a house close by, her own private house. In that time things were cheap. Now, my kids have houses. They pay three or four thousand per month.

When I worked in the fields, I earned 75 cents per hour. At that time, money was worth something.

PG: Did they always pay you?

CG: Yes.

PG: When you came to Somis, was it also with the Bracero Program, or apart from the program?

CG: No, I had already officially immigrated. After time passed, I was no longer interested in the *Bracero* program, it was mostly for those with no citizenship. When I was a bracero I spent one week in the country, one

week out. It was 18 months of solid work. But, now the *Bracero* program has ended.

CS: When your contract was up, did you return to Mexico. What did you do while waiting for a new contract?

CG: When the first 18 month contract ended, I went back to my hometown in Mexico. I was there for a month. My friend lived in Tijuana, he was in charge of letting me know when there were new *Braceros* again. One day he told me to come to Tijuana to see the incoming braceros. I then came back and obtained two more contracts of six months, and the total was 18 months.

CS: With the same boss?

CG: Yes.

CS: How many days per week did you work?

CG: Monday to Friday.

CS: How many hours a day?

CG: I don't exactly remember... eight.

PC: What was a normal work day like?



CG: We planted tomatoes, peas, cucumbers and squash. Squash like this. That was the work that we did. We also harvested tomatoes and cucumbers when they were ripe. My work was hard. All field work. Its the hardest work that there is. Like I said, where I come from it was not that easy to just go to school.

PG: What type of work did you do when you lived in Mexico?

CG: I planted corn and beans. For example, there are walls that are around houses, there they call them borders. I also built walls around houses with rock from a quarry. I did that work too. Like I said, it was also hard work.

PG: Tell me about the food you ate in the *Bracero* program.

CG: When?

PG: When you were in the *Bracero* program, did the bosses provide food?

CG: No. Those that lived in work camps were given food. I was not in a work camp. Working for my boss, I had everything I needed there. I bought the food I wanted to eat. Because we were close, we went from San Diego to Tijuana and brought back the food that we were accustomed to eating.

I was never in the camps myself. My friends were. Every month an inspector came to make sure that the workers were getting paid on time and that they were getting fed well.

Everything was very correct. In 1971 I came to Somis. This boss had a house and three workers. The place was a little field on the way to Santa Paula. I went with the foreman. Here, people cultivated lime, orange and that's all the work that there is here. We planted avocado too. Like I said, I was never in the camps.

PG: Why did some stay in camps and others, homes?

CG: Because there were some bosses who needed 20 or 30 men or more.

In the first ranch there were 70 men . On the smaller ranch, there were three or four men. These guys did not live in work camps because they gave them... Like I said, where I was, we had a house, a bed and everything else, except food, which we bought. But in that time it was not the way it is now. Now you can go to whatever store and find Mexican food.

In that time the only thing that you would see were sacks of flour ... 25 pounds, that's the only thing that there was. There was not a flour tortilla or corn tortilla in the stores. Nothing!

PG: So what did you eat?

CS: He said he was close to Tijuana.

CG: I went to Tijuana and bought what I was accustomed to.

PG: Luckily you were close.

CS: There were beans and meat and everything that one eats. I brought it all back, and we could cross the border with it. We cooked corn. One day a friend and I bought meat.

That day, the guy said "let's go eat early ...we'll get a piece of meat" For example, a piece like this, a slice.

CS: Dry?

PG: Dry. We tried to eat some of it, we were accustomed to eating meat with dinner. I was hungry but didn't eat this meat because it was horse or donkey meat or something. It became knotted...we threw it away. I did not eat it. But like I said, we brought everything back from there, like I said. After that time... I understand that the *Braceros* started in the forties and I was one of the last to come over. In that time, almost all of us were in the work camps. Well...in the work camps, you eat what they give you, whether you like it or not. Like I said, we were close to México so we got to go and bring back what we wanted to eat.

CS: What did you do for fun? Was there radio or television?

CG: We had radio. You know what...television started to come out later. Like I said, In this time, there wasn't very much with which to entertain yourself. Like I say, what you know, you know, and what you don't know, you don't know. We talked, there are still people that pass the night talking. For example, there are people that chat.. people that are 50 or 60 years old. But, this is one thing and that's another... about Mexico. Truthfully, that's what they did. I don't want to tell you that you are wrong, but you are talking about 60 or 50 years ago. I am seventy... almost 80 years wise, because I don't remember very much from when I was 7 years old. And, I said no, well yes. Like I said, for the people who grew up here, like my children, who are not even familiar with the place where we come from, because, there was never a chance to take them. They are not familiar with it at all, at all, they just don't know.

PC: Have you returned to your birthplace?

CG: Me?

PC: Yes.

CG: Last time I went was in 85'. Now we don't go. But, not before. In this country, like they say, milk and honey flow like water.

Its the richest country in the world, that's why everyone wants to be here. In other countries there is a lot of need and a lot of hunger, it's bad to say it, but its the truth. Like I said, the youth of Mexico, want to come here.

When they are here, they have money. Like we say in Mexico, here people get everything on a silver platter. They don't know what it takes. I remember a little while ago, no more than about five or six years ago, somebody was talking about the farmers, a congressman. It was on T.V. They said "Where do people think that this lettuce comes from? Where do they think these vegetables on their tables come from?"

Its these poor farmers that break their backs. And in going from one place to another, people understand that it's the truth. And my kids, and some people that do field work, they took my wife out, it was her birthday, I think it was on Friday. For more than an hour we were not served. When we ordered, thank god, fifteen minutes afterwards, we got our food.

There are no workers. It is all illegals now that are doing the work, and they're always frightened that there will be no work. Things are very hard now. I said to the waitresses, "*Do you see that?*". "*We got here more than an hour ago and there were no more than three people seated.*" "*Over there they have already started to bring food out to them.*"

I said to my wife, "*They don't have workers, because when they do, they serve people very quickly.*" I've read that they do not have enough employees in commercial enterprise or in the fields, because they do not think that the people that are here are legal. But, that's life.

PG: How did you wash your clothes when you were in the *Bracero* program?

CG: I washed it there, like we discussed, we had everything there, even a laundry mat where we washed our clothes. Like I said, in the end, nobody suffered.

But now, I go to the store and there are tortillas and everything I eat, bread and everything. In that time, there was nothing. You had to make it yourself.

PG: How did your wife come here? Was she living here?

CG: Well, I brought her here. I immigrated, then my oldest son, then her. Then we all became citizens. One of my sons was in the ARMY for 20 years. The government's only concern is itself.

It does not matter to the government if someone is a citizen or not, they just want them to join [the army] and...

Thank god that we lived in Tijuana when my three other children that are here with me were born.

My wife said to me "let's go live across the border", and so all of my children were born in Tijuana, but like I said, they all became citizens. I do say, truthfully, he who was born here was born with good luck, or with misfortune, either way [he's lucky] that he was born here.

He who becomes a citizen, does so willingly.

With one's consent...it is advisable that one becomes a citizen...because...

I have a son-in-law and a daughter-in-law that were born here. At first they were very, well, very Americanized truthfully. And, they were talking about that, but... I said...no. And, what I am saying to you both is that I wanted them to be proud of being Mexican. They look Mexican.

But, we are Mexicans, even though some were born here, we are of the Mexican race. It's the truth. That's how it is.

PG: When did they pay you as a *Bracero*? How often did they pay you?

CG: Every fifteen days. One earned 75 cents per hour.

PG: Could you save anything...or did you spend your money?

CG: My family, I spent it on food, I spent it on clothes, my wife. And, when I brought them here... ( the interviewee coughs)

PG: Did you send it to them through mail?

CG: Yes, by mail.

PG: And was it difficult in those times to be without your family?

CG: Well, being without family is always difficult. ( the interviewee laughs)  
Its always difficult to be far from one's family.

PG: Did everyone make the same [salary] ?

CG: I think so. All these people came here contracted to work in the fields. To harvest the crops. For example, there were some that worked primarily on tractors. They made more [money]. Still here, when I was working here,

like I told you, in Somis, many years ago... my son, my oldest worked here [driving] tractors. And... he did not make what I made. He made more. But, like I said, when I came here, I didn't work like I did in San Diego.

Here I worked as an irrigator, irrigating orange, lemon and avocado orchards, or whatever [type of orchard].

I crouched down, harvesting cucumber and stocking it. To harvest cucumber, one has to bend down to the floor. In every part [of the field] there was an irrigator, even though it was in the field. But, there are different jobs. When I lived here, there was purely lemon harvesting. In... seventy something.

I came here, and, then, some [people] from here had gone to war. In the end, there were blacks harvesting lemons. They were found here in Somis, by the freeway. They were hitch-hiking... and... and they had their bags. With no more than that, dragging their bag alongside the freeway. But, they were not able to do the work. It can be attested to; that it is purely latinos who do the hardest jobs here. And, like i said, the gringos are useless when it comes to working. But that's something else, the way they work.

PG: And if you got sick... would they pay you?

CS: Well, frankly I have been blessed by god. I've never been sick, thank god, I never got sick. In all the years that I was contracted I never got sick.

PG: Did you ever have a problem at work?



CG: Oh no.

PG: Well, what happened was...

CG: No, like I said, at work, there were three or four workers. The bosses were Japanese. There, no more than one person spoke English and he was the one who could communicate with the bosses. He did a little of this and a little of that, everything. They never mistreated me.

PG: And what did you do for your days off?

CG: For example, like I said, we went to Tijuana. It was to bring back food... Saturday and Sunday. There, we bought what we wanted to eat. And, like I said, we had everything there [ at our house]; a kitchen, a stove, a place to wash our clothes, we had everything.

PG: Was there a Catholic church there.. just in case the people wanted to go to mass?

CG: Mmm... no there was not.

PG: And for the Mexican independence days, like the 16th of September... what did they do?

CG: Well, for that day we went to Tijuana where they have a big party. We went there ( the interviewee coughs), like I said, we were so close [to Tijuana].

PG: How did they get to Tijuana? By truck?

CG: No, the workers that worked there had cars. We went by car. Sometimes it was very rainy and we went on the bus. But, that season was very short.

PG: Do you have any pleasant memories of your years working as a bracero?

CG: Look, when one is young, everything is wonderful. It's the truth. When one is old, if your foot does not hurt, your hand does. And, when you're in pain, everything changes. Ha ha ha! One of my kids said... he's a joker...

“ Dad, I don't believe you had black hair!”

I said, “ Do you think that the whole time I looked like this?” Just joking, but it's true. When one is young, they believe the world is theirs for the taking.

PG: Were there any programs in Spanish on the radio?

CG: We got our radio [stations] from Tijuana. What year was it? Who was I there with? Oh, I was there with Serafin! Before you all [referring to his family] came here.

There was not more than an hour of television in Spanish. Now, there are more stations than ever. Back then... you should have seen it.

We got Spanish radio from Tijuana. We were close by.

PG: Until what year did you continue working?

CG: What?

PG: When did you stop working? Not just in the *Bracero* program, but after that.

CG: I retired when I was 75 years old. It has been more than 20 years since I retired. There are many people that, three or four years after they retire, they're gone. Thank god I have had a long life, I'm here.

PG: And, were there people in the program who worked during the length of their contract, then went back to Mexico to stay there?

CG: Like I said, If the bosses liked the way that one worked, they would renew the contract. And those who they were not happy with... after the six months, back to Mexico! That's how it was. If they liked a worker, they would give him another contract. That's how it was.

PG: How many years have you been married?

CG: Like 40... we got married in 44' ... do the math. We were married in 44'.

(the spouse speaks): 73' , in 55' my oldest was born.

PG: What is the secret to being married for so long?

CG: A man has to live by his word. When you get married there [ in Mexico] the fathers tell you “ you are going to be for this woman for as long as you live”.

And, you swear up and down.

Back in my time in Mexico, they said , for example, “Come to my house. How much do you want for her?, When do I give you the money?”

They did not write up a paper, the did not do anything [official]. It was all a gentleman’s agreement. That idea stayed with me. The idea that one’s word matters. And all that time, they did things through such informal agreements.

And they take you [to the church] and you give them your word, and you swear that you will [make the marriage] last. And now, after two or three years, people are getting divorced. What is that?

I give advice to a lot of people and the say “oh, thank you”.

When somebody gives their word, they have to follow through.

Once, we had a station wagon, and were were going to sell it. We put a sign on it that said that it was for sale. A man called me and said “Are you selling the station wagon?”

“No” the man said to my daughter-in-law. One of the guys said to the other “ what do we want it for, its useless to us.”

It was not going to be useful any more. She said to him

“ Why don’t I sell you the pickup instead?” I said.

“ We want the station wagon, sell it to us.” they said.

I said, “500 dollars for her.”

He did not say anything to me. He just shoved his hand in his pocket and gave me five, one hundred dollar bills.

I went to my kids and I said “ oh no, I sold it!”

“Break the deal!”

No, for me, to give one’s word is a simple thing. To function as a man of his word. And as a kid, one gets ideas in their head. Unfortunately, kids get the wrong idea sometimes too. For example , as a kid I said “ women are for working”. Because in those times women were slaves. In those times they did not have any rights. It was only a little while ago that they were given the right to vote. Women were not taken into account in those days.

In my time, one had to keep his word.

PG: Sir, it was wonderful to talk with you. Thank you for permitting us to come to your house to speak with you.

CG: Thank you. I just want to ask you... what significance does this have? In the end, we met here at six... and they [the government] are not going to give me the money that they owe me. They’re not giving me anything, they say they gave it to Mexico. We were already there. They ask me to go to Santa Paula once in a while.

CS: That is the government's business. We are not informed about the money that the government owes to the *Braceros*. I have heard the stories in the news and the newspaper. But, that's the government's business. Truthfully, we do not know what they are planning to do or how they are going to correct [the situation] with the money that they owe you.

CG: Yes, it was in the news and one of my sons said "Dad, it would be good if you went..."

Well if its about the *Braceros*, that's something else. I don't want anything to do with the *Braceros*. Another one of my son's said "lets go, I will bring you"

The day of the meeting we went and we saw Pilar. My son asked her "how much will you pay us?". That was my son who is a joker. Now that I know her, she's a good woman.

My son told her "we are going to rent him out".

Well, one more and we can take a vacation. I said "come on, you too, you and the others".

The truth is that... I do not know what this is about.

CS: This project is for the Smithsonian Museum. They are collecting stories. They want to record stories for their archives. They are also asking if there are *Braceros* that have any items from that time. They are asking for physical things as well, like tools or things that you would use in the fields. They want things to put in the museums.

They realize that there are many people that came in these 20 years and now they are citizens and here they can remember their past. This project

is about being able to have a record of this. As far as the money they owe you is concerned, I do not know what will happen with that.

CG: Yeah, that's something else I suppose. My son more or less told me what this was about. Pilar, that woman that is friends with my daughter-in-law... she made me have more confidence in all this. I already knew about this. I went to Los Angeles and gave them all of my information. Then, they lost all the papers. Nothing functions... then we went to another one in Ventura. Then, there are more meetings in Santa Paula... and I am not going! Like we say in Mexico... "It's like putting corn on a pigeon". They are not ever going to return my money. You would have to pay lawyers, one after another.

They say they want all the details at the consulate. I have my contracts from 56' and 58', we went there and we gave them the contracts and they made copies of everything. Now they do not ask me any more questions. Because they have all of the dates, the birth certificate, the consulate sign-up and the Mexican passport. They have everything there, nothing is missing. My son told me more or less about the museum and what was going on there. There was a show about farmers and how they were working at that time and how much they made...etcetera. Even though the modern people laugh at them and... they analyze how things were for everyone. There are people that know what it means, all the stuff in that museum, it's big for some people. I do not have to talk to you anymore. I have more or less answered all of the questions.

PG: Thank you very much sir, for your time. It has been very interesting talking to you.

CG: Sure, here we are... why don't we finish? I'll tell you a secret. We have talked for so long [ that I am tired].

CS: Thank you for sharing your Sunday with us.

CG: Thank you to you. Young people should know about history. This year, my friend, he does not have anything he needs to prove, he came to stay with me. He came to Los Angeles. There are many young people that work there, and two women... and they fill out papers.

What is that called...? The consulate. That's were my wife worked. What was her boss' name? If they don't have the dates and details, they think its all a lie. The young people that work there... I don't know what they do... fight grandpas.

CS: Do you think its strange, what they were doing?

CG: I think so because my sister-in-law went with me and she told me "answer the questions that they ask you" She said "I don't know if they know that you are telling the truth". Another women in... I don't know where she worked, asked me "what was your boss' name?". I gave them all the papers and they still think everything is a lie. And they fight and they fight... ha ha ha!